

## MEMORIAL HALL RENOVATION ☆ THE LATER YEARS

**M**emorial Hall has undergone repairs and renovations in the one hundred years since its construction. It also went through an uncertain period in the 1960's when some groups called for plans to enlarge the building; others to sell; still others to tear down to make room for a parking ramp. Fortunately, the hall was spared the wrecking ball when efforts to create a parking lot as part of an urban renewal movement were unsuccessful. In 1962, the County Board of Supervisors voted to cancel plans to sell the hall.

Following that vote, the County Board spent \$30,000 for improvements to the building which included sand-blasting the exterior, waterproofing the stone, plus caulking and painting

window frames and refinishing stairways and landings. In 1966, a large stone marker was cemented into the sidewalk in front of the hall to commemorate the dedication of the hall on June 3, 1903 by then President Theodore Roosevelt.

In 1978, a federal grant matched \$25,000 in renovation funds for work on the heating, wiring and insulation. However, by the late 1980's, the building had deteriorated so much that it needed major renovations, repairs and modernization. A County Board committee, including Rep. Dave Winters and Peggy McGaw (wife of former Mayor Robert McGaw) was formed to develop a



*The auditorium before (above) and after renovation (below).*



plan. Working with the City who provided War Memorial funds which came from the sale of Camp Grant, a four-year \$1.5 million restoration project began in 1988.

Phase one included the main floor and downstairs; phase two, the landscaping and phase three: the auditorium. Under the watchful eye of architect Joe Zimmer, the building was restored to its original splendor.

Following renovation, the County searched for a tenant who could occupy the building, acting as a steward for the building and allowing for visitors all week long. The Rockford Area Convention and Visitors Bureau answered the call and acted as a good steward of the building. Veteran's groups still meet in the building, an office is maintained in the lower level for the Veteran's Assistance program; and space in the auditorium is available to groups at a modest rate.

